

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Case File No.: A-060160
AK-040-02-EA-005

Applicant: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE)

Type of Action: Partial Revocation of Public Land Order No. 5108, Snettisham Power Project

Location: Tract C, Parcel 2, within U.S. Survey No. 1762, Juneau Townsite Elimination Survey, Sections. 4, 9, 10 and 11, T. 42 S., R. 68 E., Copper River Meridian, Alaska.

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Date: December 10, 2001

I. INTRODUCTION

The Snettisham Hydroelectric Project (Snettisham) was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) to provide power to the City of Juneau. COE was authorized to construct across BLM lands by the Act of October 23, 1962, 76 Stat. 1173, 1193, and Public Land Order (PLO) 5108 of August 17, 1971. The 43-mile 138 kV transmission line connecting the project to the Juneau substation was placed into service in 1972.

In February 1974, a 3.9-mile portion of transmission line which crossed Salisbury Ridge was rendered inoperative when three aluminum towers collapsed due to high winds. This part of the transmission line was rebuilt outside of the lands withdrawn by PLO 5108. COE received a right-of-way, serial number AA-76934, from BLM for the new line segment in 1994.

On May 28, 1996, the U.S. Department of the Army, Corp of Engineers, submitted a Notice of Intention to Relinquish that portion of the Snettisham Power Project area withdrawn by PLO 5108 that was no longer being used for the purpose originally withdrawn. The State of Alaska has identified this portion of the withdrawal as part of their entitlement under the Statehood Act. Upon revocation of the subject PLO, it will be opened to the mining laws and be made available to the State of Alaska for conveyance.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The partial revocation of PLO 5108, dated August 17, 1971, as amended, containing approximately 84.01 acres of land, is needed because the lands are not being used for the purpose for which they were withdrawn. A majority of this township has been conveyed to the State of Alaska and the revocation will make the remaining land available to the State. If the land is not conveyed to the State of Alaska the revocation will open the land to metalliferous and non-metalliferous mining and mineral leasing.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

No land use plan exists for this area. However, the environmental analysis assesses the impacts of the Proposed Action and provides a basis for a decision on the proposal, 43 CFR 1610.8 (b) (1).

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is the partial revocation of PLO 5108, as it affects approximately 84.01 acres of land near Juneau, Alaska (see attached map). This will permit the land to be conveyed to the State of Alaska.

The subject lands, Tract C, Parcel 2, are legally described as follows:

A strip of land located within U.S. Survey No. 1762, Juneau Townsite Elimination, Sections 4, 9, 10 and 11, T. 42 S., R. 68 E., Copper River Meridian, Alaska, Juneau Recording District, First Judicial District, State of Alaska; said strip being 300.00 feet wide, lying 150.00 feet each side of the following described center line:

All locations, bearings and distances are in Universal Transverse Mercator Grid System (U.T.M.), Zone 8.

Commencing at Corner No. 3, U.S. Survey No. 3269, said corner having U.T.M. grid Coordinates (converted to feet) of North 21,186,881.71 and East 1,772,092.04;

thence South 40°47'33" East, along that boundary line lying between corner No. 3 and corner No. 4 of said survey, for a distance of 1,723.52 feet, to a point of intersection with the centerline of an existing 300.00 foot wide transmission line Right-of-Way, said point being North 40°47'33" West, 163.04 feet from corner No. 4 of said survey;

thence along said centerline South 50°38'41" East, 2,912.77 feet to tower T-56A;

thence South 64°06'35" East, 696.25 to the TRUE POINT OF BEGINNING;

thence South 64°06'35" East, 8,075.11 feet to tower T-56;

thence South 50°28'42" East, 1,450.00 feet, more or less, to the easterly boundary line of U.S. Survey No. 1762 and the terminus of this description.

It is understood that the northeast and southwest boundaries of this right-of-way are to be prolonged and shortened so as to terminate on the easterly boundary of U.S. Survey No. 1762;

The above strip of land herein described contains 84.01 acres, more or less.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would leave the land withdrawn by PLO 5108, under the administration of the U.S. Department of the Army, Corp of Engineers, and the land would not be conveyed to the State of Alaska.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed and are either not present or will not be affected by the Proposed Action:

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Environmental Justice
- Farmlands (Prime or Unique)
- Floodplains
- Invasive, Non-native Species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)
- Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
- Wetlands/Riparian Zones
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness

1. Cultural Resources

On June 11, 1997, an information packet regarding the entire Snettisham revocation of withdrawal for 15,440 acres was sent to the SHPO in accordance with the 1991 Programmatic Agreement regarding the Revocation of Withdrawals with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. This information packet included consultation with the archaeologist with the Tongass National Forest. The SHPO's office did not respond within the 30 day comment period and their concurrence with the action was assumed. The USFS conducted several surveys over a period of several years in the area of the 15,440 acre withdrawal. No sites are known for the present 84.01 acre revocation of withdrawal and no previously undiscovered sites are expected for the Area of Potential Effect due to the low potential for cultural resources on such steep slopes. No further consultation is necessary under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

2. Subsistence:

The Proposed Action occurs on Federal Public Lands as defined in ANILCA and fall under the regulatory authority of the Federal Subsistence Board. The lands upon revocation instantaneously become a valid selection by the State of Alaska and would no longer fall under the authority of the Federal Subsistence Program. The site may be of adequate size, accessibility or productively to produce a sustainable surplus of subsistence resources. Current subsistence uses, however, are very limited by access and terrain, and the economics of subsistence use. The harvest of wildlife would occur primarily at lower elevations and during seasons where the economics of harvest are more feasible. There are no documented records indicating the site has significant subsistence use or is a source of subsistence resources. The transfer of these Federal Public Lands to the State of Alaska's management jurisdiction is insignificant to current subsistence use patterns, harvest quantities, access to subsistence resources or changes in distribution of current resources.

The Proposed Action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of subsistence resources, or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions.

B. Land Status:

This portion of the Snettisham Power Project area withdrawn by PLO 5108 is located approximately 28 miles southwest of Juneau, Alaska. The lands effected are either adjacent to State Tentatively Approved lands or State selected lands.

C. Wildlife:

The area provides habitat for bears, both black and brown bears. Mountain goats may utilize the area occasionally but generally are found at higher elevations above the area to be relinquished. Resident and migrant land birds nest and feed in surrounding forest habitats. There have been no wildlife surveys completed in this area to determine numbers and distribution in the general area.

D. Forest Resources:

The area under the power line was cleared of vegetation and revegetated naturally to a mixture of grasses, sedges and shrubs. The location of any forest resource in the project area is such that it is not commercially operable due to slope and access constraints. The size and arrangement of the area affected by the proposed action would also make commercial harvest of forest products unlikely. Since the area has been previously cleared for a power line corridor, the amount and value of any remaining timber on the site is likely to be minimal.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

There are two concrete tower bases located on the withdrawn area to be relinquished. The U.S. Forest Service completed a helicopter reconnaissance of the area on which the old transmission line was located. It was their recommendation, to which the State of Alaska and BLM concurred, that the concrete tower bases were not visually obtrusive to the area. Further removal of these concrete tower pads could very well result in more visual impacts from potential resource damage to soils and vegetation. Therefore, the determination was made to allow the concrete tower bases to remain on site.

Without periodic clearing required by the operation of the power line, the vegetation along the old power line route will ultimately return to a spruce forest.

The Proposed Action will not substantially affect the forest resource. The change of jurisdiction would not result in a loss of vegetation. The overall impacts on the integrity of the vegetation within the withdrawn area are expected to be minimal.

The proposed partial revocation is administrative in nature and would have no additional effects on the human environment, but would lead to management by the State of Alaska.

The revocation of the withdrawal would not impact the existing wildlife habitat.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

There are no impacts under the No Action Alternative.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

There are no residual or cumulative impacts.

D. Mitigation Measures:

There are no mitigation measures needed.

E. Residual Impacts:

No direct or indirect impacts will occur with the transfer of the jurisdiction of the withdrawal. Cumulatively this action would not add to any impacts to this area of Alaska.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

List of Preparers:

Donna Redding, Archeologist

Bruce Seppi, Wildlife Biologist

Debbie Blank, State Botanist

David Kelley, Surface Protection Specialist

Mike Scott, Fisheries Biologist

Jeff Denton, Wildlife Biologist

Jake Schlapfer, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Wayne Svejnoha, State Hazardous Materials Specialist

Mike Zaidlicz, Forester